

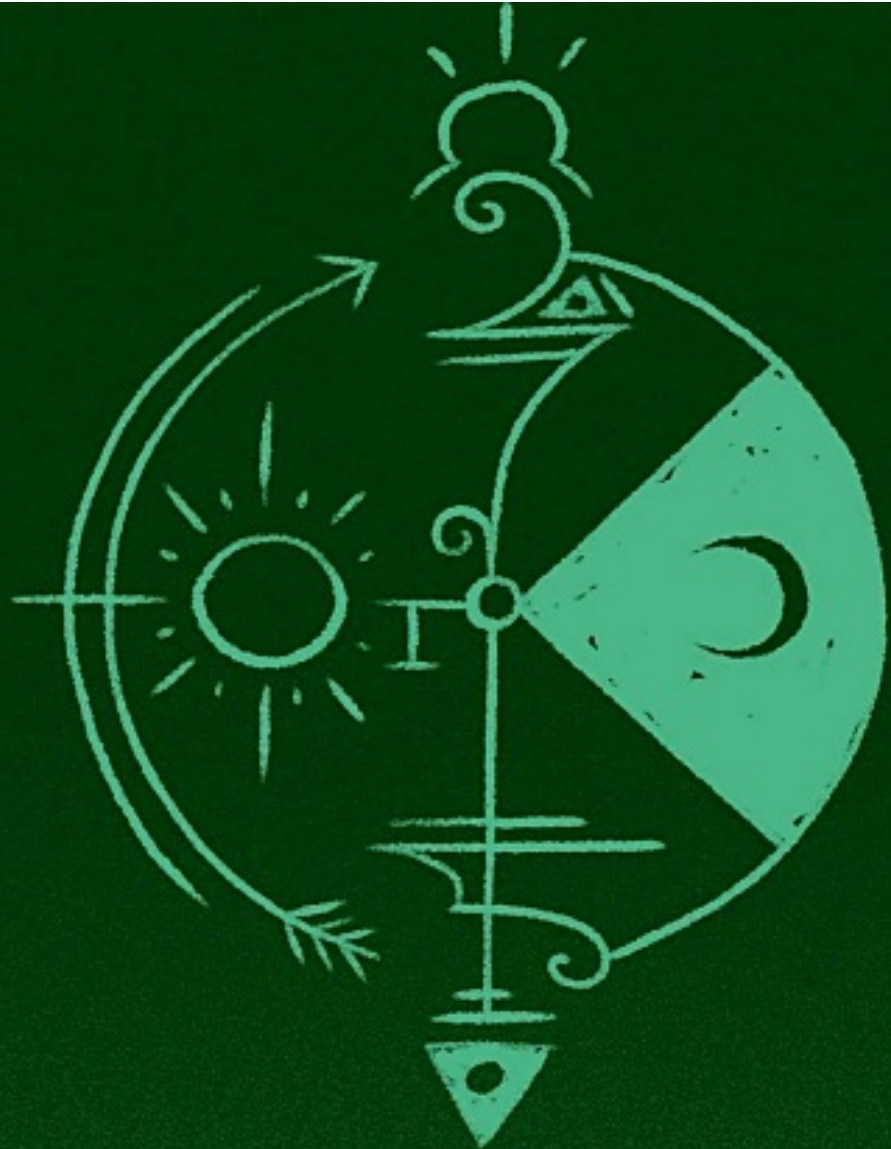


THE MIDWINTER WITCH

MOLLY KNOX OSTERLAG

AUTHOR OF THE WITCH BOY AND THE HIDDEN WITCH

 SCHOLASTIC



MOLLY KNOX OSTERAG

THE
MIDWINTER
WITCH



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healing

physical injury

magical elements of:
- fire
- grass

ice shaping

ice
force to move ice
snow
change depending how far ice moves
thanks Juniper

call

keep steady force

stonecald

water
silver



★ teach to Ariel! ★
who ne?
e me
ston.
↓
p)3.
ling

growing plants

add name of plant

pear

apple

grape

vines

blackberry

simple (fast)
binding

name

containment
(written)

what
is this
far? she wants
tell me
type ii
two
↓
H
C
+
dysp
th
group

For witch boys, shifter girls,
and those who are in between.

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Library of Congress Control Number Available

e-ISBN 978-1-338-56640-6

First edition, November 2019

Edited by Amanda Maciel

Color by Molly Knox Ostertag and Maarta Laiho

Lettering by Molly Knox Ostertag

Additional color by Niki Smith

Author photo © Leslie Ranne

Book design by Molly Knox Ostertag and Phil Falco

Publisher: David Saylor

The way the tales
tell it, magic is a
wild force.



It is the province
of spirits and demons, and
they can use it as easily
as we breathe.

It does not come
as naturally to us, but a
rare few human families
can see magic.

Over many
generations, we have
learned to shape it.





Through runes
and potions, spells and
shifting, we put it to
use for good.

To help and
defend those without
magic.

But magic
is not ours, and it
never was.

Uncontrolled, it
can turn to darkness
when wielded by human
hands.





There is a
reason we stay in
close-knit families.

The safeguards
must be passed down.



Magic is a gift, a blessing . . . and a great responsibility.



Which means, Ariel Torres, that young witches need to *pay attention* to their magic lessons!







... Think she's mad at me?



She's, uh ... not super patient.



What is this Festival thing, anyway?

CLOMP

CLOMP



Wait, did no one tell you? It's coming up in, like, a week!

shrug



Okay, it's the coolest thing ever. Once a year during Midwinter, our whole family has a big gathering.

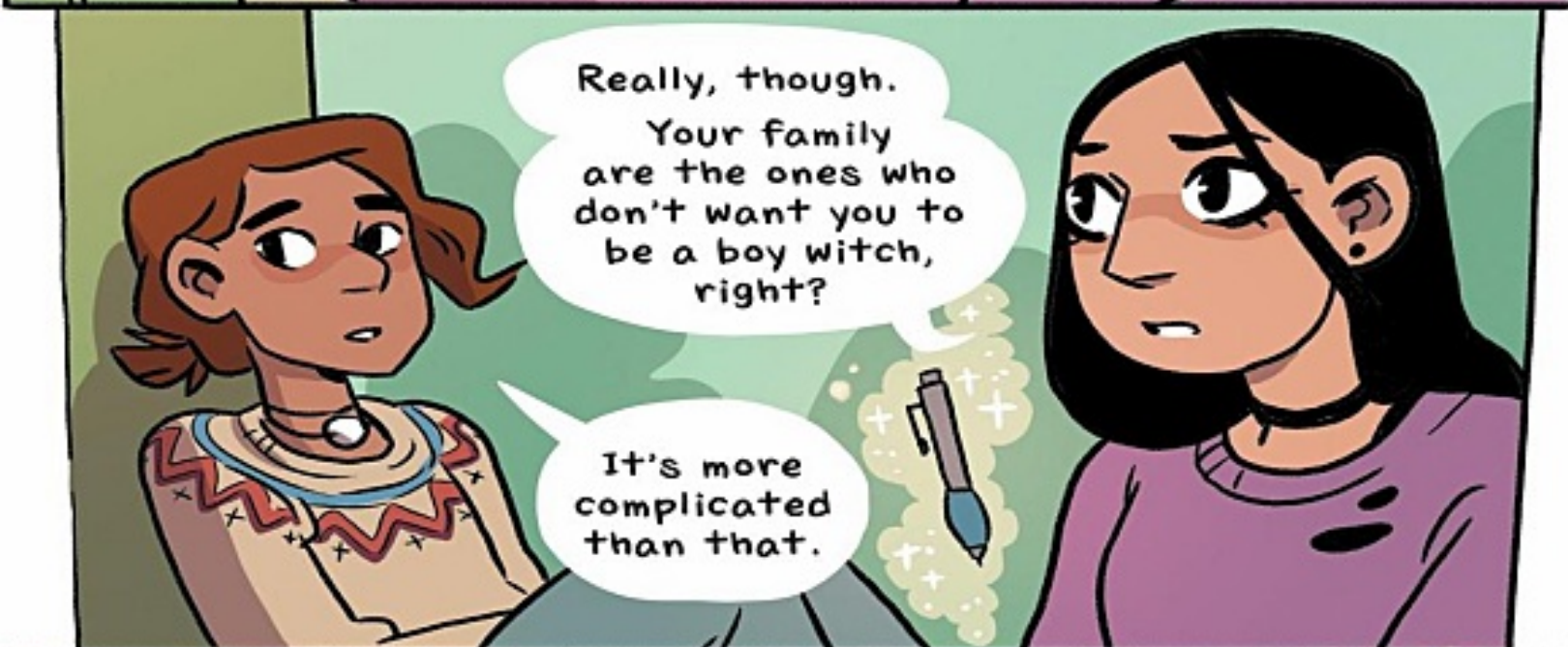


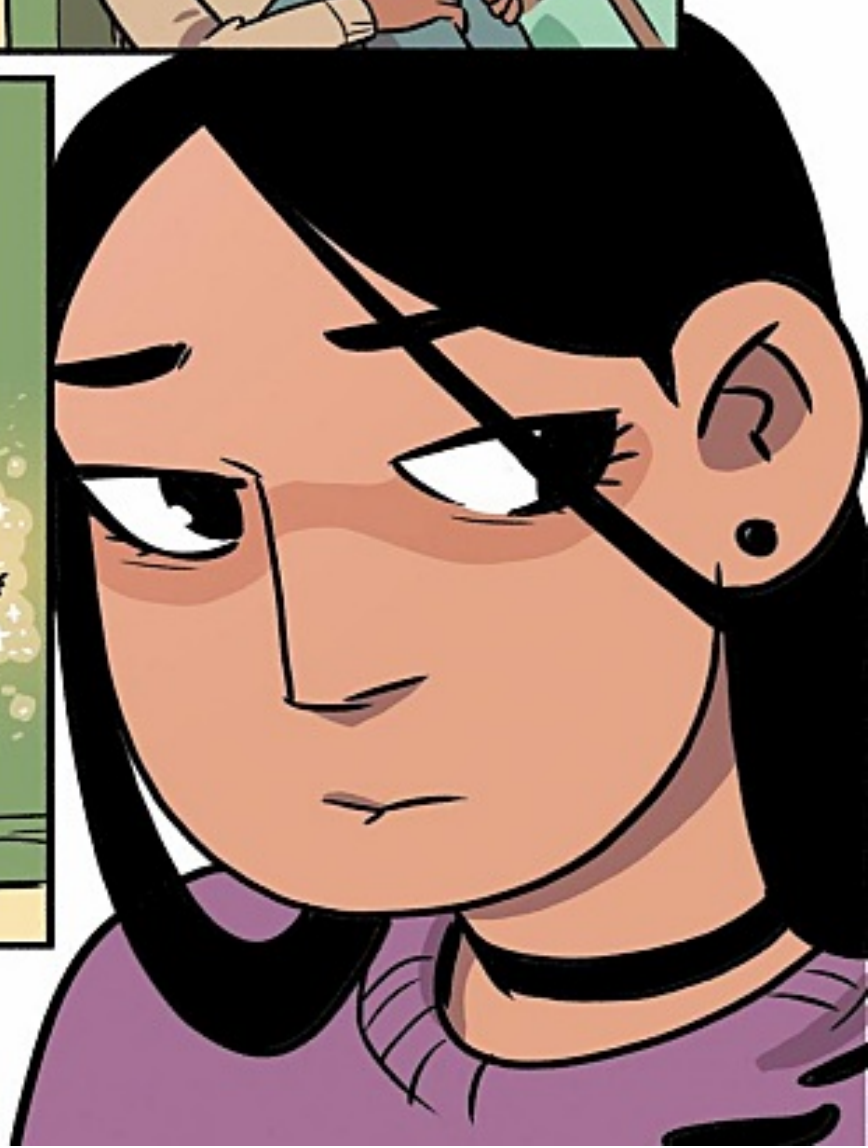
There's more of you?

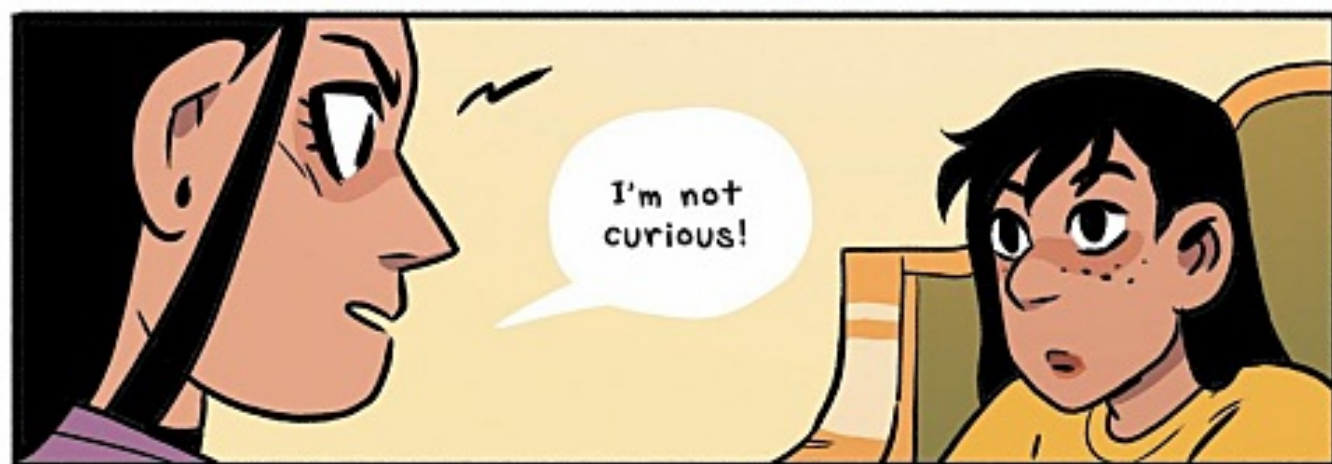
Yeah, it's all our distant cousins and people who are related by marriage. There's so many of us.











Anyway, magical tradition is important, because --



Maybe to you.

Come on guys, can you not bicker for once?



We don't --





I said you
were doing the
spell wrong!



Any chance
there's a spell to
clean up ink?



Oh
sure!



It's called
paper towels. And
soap.











How was class today, Ariel?



Um . . . did you hear about the tree?

Don't worry about the tree.



I guess I'm not very good at controlling my magic . . .



You can learn! Aster's good at that, aren't you, hon?

Yeah! And to be fair, you were really good at *starting* the fire.



Mom, tell Ariel that the Midwinter Festival is actually cool and fun, she doesn't believe me.

Oh, the Festival is lovely . . .



I was the Midwinter Witch myself, once.

I didn't know that! Do you still have the crown and everything?

Crown?



You get a crown if you win the Jolrun, made of enchanted flowers . . .

Every year there's one shifter who's crowned, and one witch.









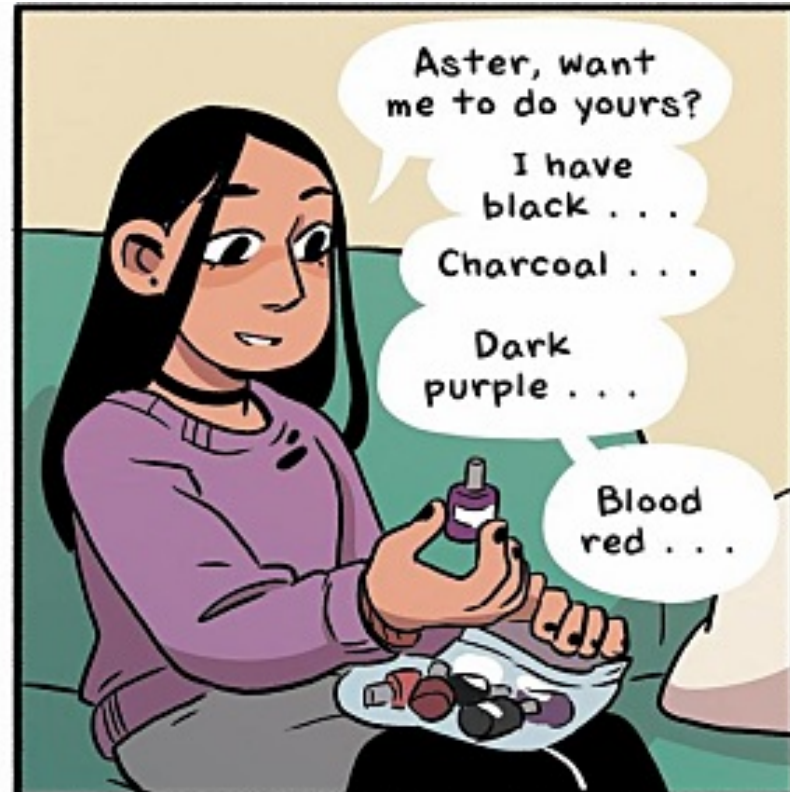
Everyone at school
says it's so scary, it's
impossible to finish . . .















Vanissen family reunion.
I guess I'm going, too.

Aster's going to be in, like, a magical race or something.



What's up, Aster?



It's called the Jolrun. And I'm not doing it.



My mom told me not to. Thinks people aren't ready to see a boy witch doing magic yet.

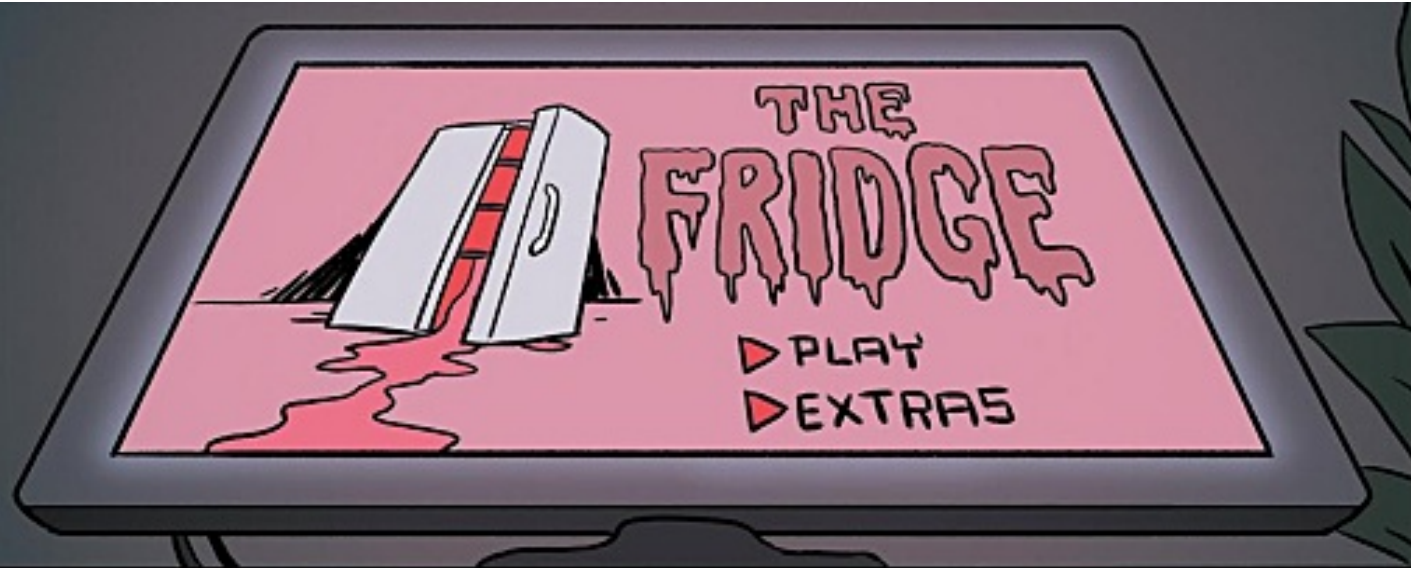














Ariel?

Is it
really
you?

I've been
searching for
so long . . .







Where are you training?

At the Vanissens' house.

It doesn't look *anything* like this.

The Vanissens?

Tch, that's a shame . . .



Someone of your talents shouldn't be held back by all the rules that *traditional* witches have.

Ariel is shown from the chest up, looking slightly to the right with a thoughtful expression. She has dark hair in a braid and is wearing a purple sweater.

There are a lot of rules . . .

A close-up of Isabel's face, looking down at Ariel with a slight smile. She has dark hair and is wearing a green top.

Don't you ever want to see what you can really do?

To push your powers to the limit?

Sometimes . . .

Ariel and Isabel are standing in a doorway, holding hands. Ariel is on the left, looking up at Isabel. Isabel is on the right, looking down at their hands. Isabel is wearing a green dress with a floral pattern.

Ariel, this is a dream -- but I am real.

Blood relatives can always find each other like this.

Ariel is shown from the chest up, looking up with a confused expression. She has dark hair in a braid and is wearing a purple sweater.

What? Who are you?

A close-up of Isabel's face, looking down. She has dark hair and is wearing a green dress with a floral pattern.

Isabel.

Isabel Torres.



And you are
Elena's lost child,
are you not?

Elena?



Just say
the word, and I'll
come to you.

You can
live with me, I'll
teach you --



You
abandoned
me!

I don't want
anything to do
with you!



Elena was my
sister, my ally.

But then she
got sick. She grew
weak.



And she
pushed me
away.



She's dead.



Why she
didn't want her own
sister to care for you
when she was gone,
I don't know.

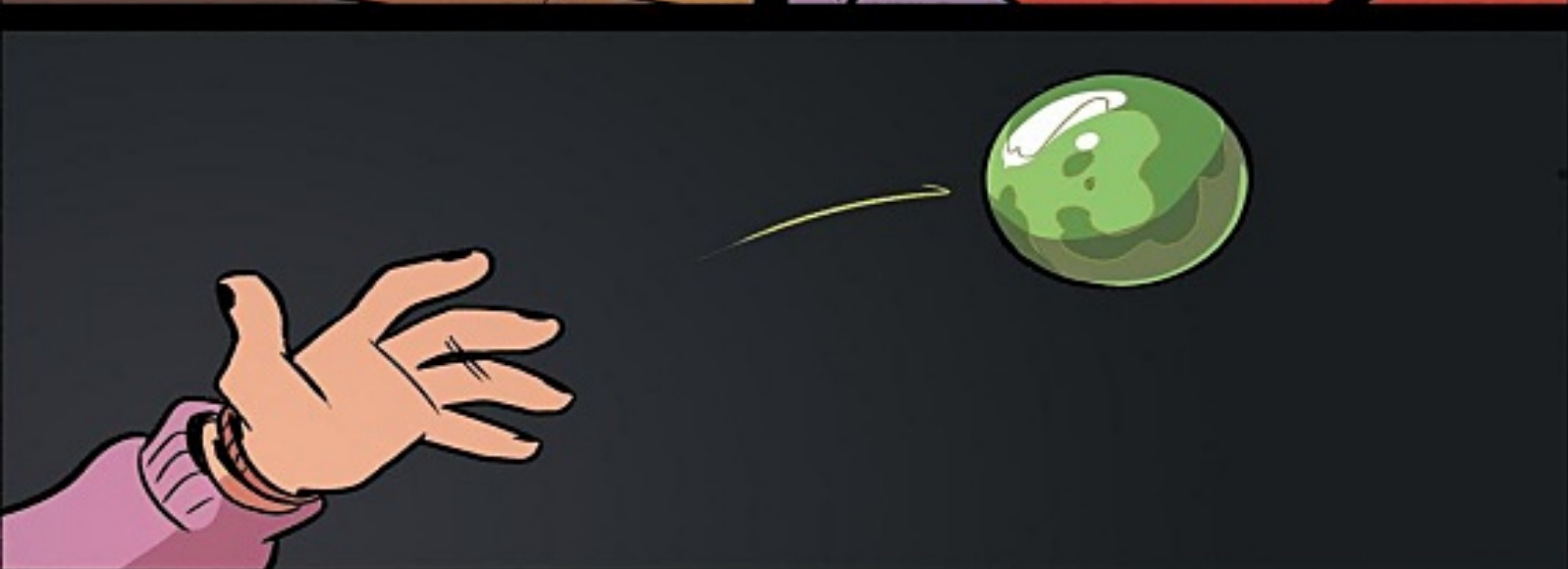
She sent
you away, and
I lost you . . .
until now.

I want
to wake up.



Ariel, the
Vanissens are
useless.

You're so much
more powerful than
them. They will *never*
understand you.

















Leyline
manipulation . . .
Stonecalling . . .

Ice
shaping . . .

Are you
training for
the Jolrun?

I know you
probably think
it's dumb --

Does Mom
know?

Not
yet.

Don't tell
her, okay?

sigh

I'm
not gonna
tell her.

I probably
won't actually
do it.

I can't
figure out ice
shaping.



HEY!







Well, it's a field trip that our homeschool group is going on . . .

Yes, just two days and two nights . . .

Oh, don't worry, our whole family will be there, it's very safe . . .



Our Charlie wants more school over winter break?













Aha!
Here we
go.

If we can
just keep on this
leyline, and get up
speed . . .

















There's
so many
people!

There's a lot
of us, yeah!



Come on, let's
get good seats for
the Jolrun!

It's
happening
now?



Just the one
for shifters. The
one for witches is
tomorrow.

Let's
go!



A close-up of a boy with brown hair, looking surprised with wide eyes. He is wearing a brown jacket and a red scarf.

Is that Aster?
The boy who's studying
witchery?

A close-up of the same boy, looking slightly more concerned or thoughtful. He is still wearing the same brown jacket and red scarf.

A boy
witch?
Ew!

A close-up of the same boy, looking thoughtful with a slight frown. He is still wearing the same brown jacket and red scarf.

I wouldn't let my
son be a witch.
What must Holly and
Tohor be thinking . . .

A group of five people are standing in a snowy field with trees in the background. Aster is in the center, looking slightly annoyed with his arms crossed. A girl with brown hair is on the left, looking at him. A boy with brown hair is on the right, looking at him. A girl with brown hair is on the far right, looking at him. A boy with brown hair is on the far left, looking at him.

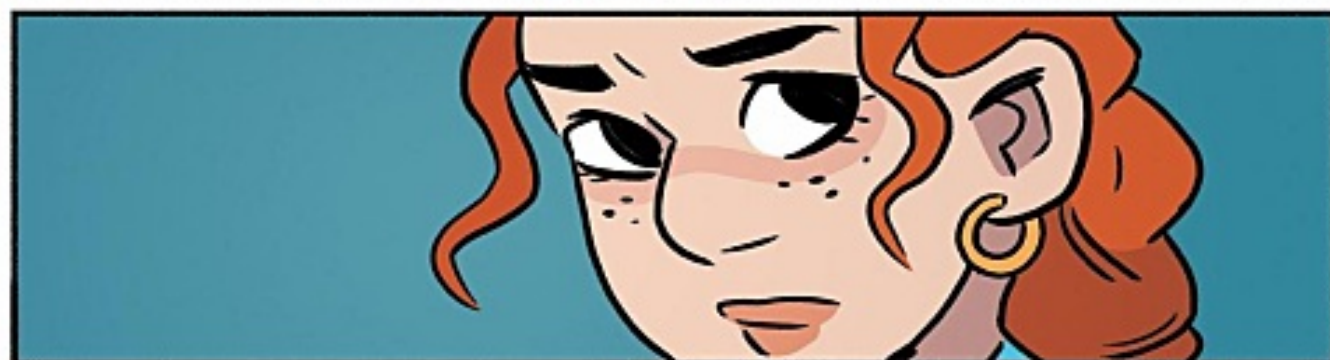
Well, if it
isn't little
Aster.

A close-up of a boy with brown hair, looking surprised with wide eyes. He is wearing a brown jacket and a red scarf.

I heard you're
doing *witchery*
now?









So is it a race, or what?

Kind of!



There's a place where gravity works kinda funny, because of all the leylines . . .

And at the center there's a frozen lake, and they're all trying to reach the stone in the middle of it.



. . . I have so many questions.







You talked about it.



Do you really want to do witchery in front of everyone?

I'm looking out for you, Aster, it's just so public --

If you're embarrassed, just say it.



...



This is *finally* my chance to do the Jolrun as a witch.

Maybe you'll be proud if I win, I don't know, but that's not why I'm doing it!





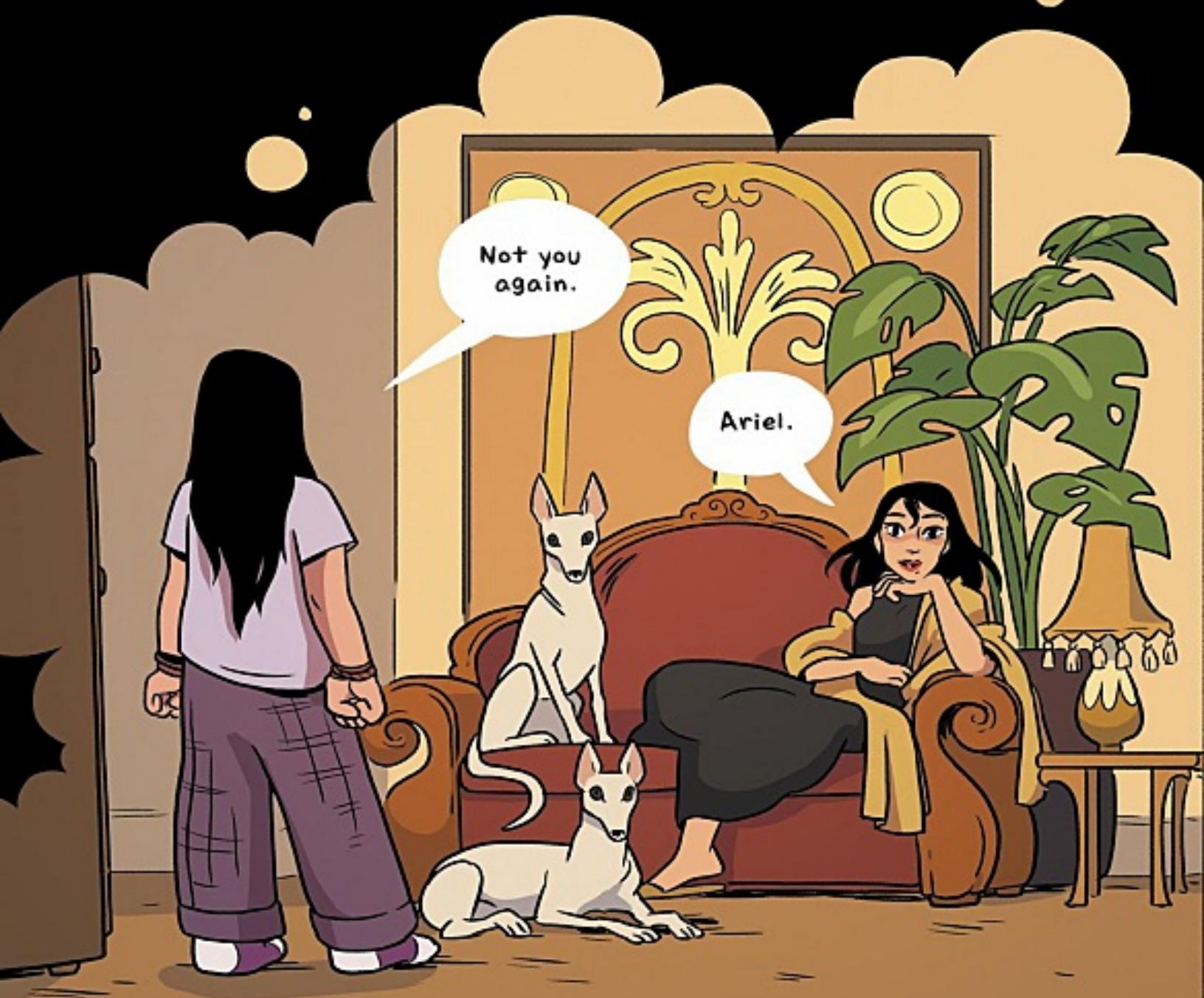














I wanted
to see you
again.

I think we got
off on the wrong
foot before.



You know,
when I was little,
I thought one of
you would come
for me.



But you never
did, and now things
are finally good, so
please just leave
me alone.



Fair
enough.





While you're here, do you have any questions? If this is to be your last visit?

Elena was the eldest.

We grew up in this house --

STOP!

What . . .

What did you mean before, about being powerful?

About how the Vanissens won't understand me?

Traditional witches.

They believe in harmony and balance, family and togetherness . . . and oh so many rules.



I believe that witches like us should be free to do what we want.



Take what we want.



You can be so much more powerful if you don't follow the rules.





Are there
more of you?

Of us?



Certainly.

But you're
lucky I found you
first.



Elena and I were
allies against all of them,
and if you let me train you,
we can be allies, too.



I can
tell you're like
me, Ariel.

Like your
mother, before
she grew ill.



Our magic
turns to curses and
destruction.



The
Fetch.



Yes, indeed,
Fetches can be
very useful.



But I'm not
like that.

I don't
hurt people
anymore.



It's in your
blood, my dear. You *will*
end up hurting the ones
around you.



Do you want me
to break another
window?

Fiery.

I like
you, niece.



Sooner
or later, the
Vanissens will
turn on you.





You'll see.



When that happens, draw this rune.



I'll be there soon enough.



I don't
believe you.



I'm not
like that
anymore.













You don't
have to do the
Jolrun.

But if you
want to be a part of this
family . . . it would be one
way to show that.







Jumping off a cliff isn't my idea of fun, but . . .





Magic makes
the gravity all
weird here.



So even if
you fall . . .



Still . . .

You just
float until someone
helps you.



It's
a long way
down!







Got a strategy?

A comic book illustration showing three children standing on a grey, rocky cliff. The child on the left is a boy in a yellow jacket and brown pants. The child in the middle is a girl with a red scarf, wearing a white shirt and grey pants. The child on the right is a boy in a blue and orange jacket and blue pants. They are looking down at a large, dark grey computer monitor floating in the air. The monitor has a blue outline of a keyhole and a square icon. Below the monitor, a smaller, similar object is floating. The background is a light blue sky with some clouds. The cliff has a jagged edge and some small rocks.

Oh, Juniper gave me a few ideas . . .



Young witches,
the rules of the Jolrun
are simple.

Any spells may be
used, so long as they do
not cause harm to the
other contestants.



Touch each
stone on your
way down.

And relax if
you fall. You will be
helped when the
game is over.

Is that
Holly and Tohor's
boy?

His name is
Aster, and he's
gonna win.







































CLAP CLAP CLAP
CLAP CLAP

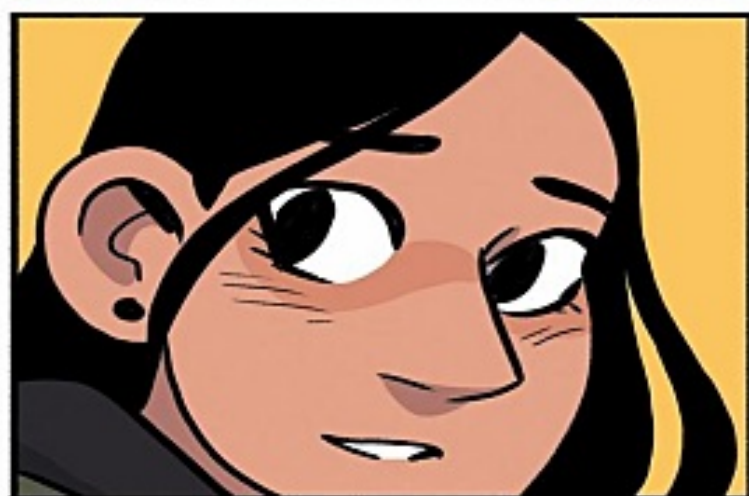
And in a
fiery conclusion,
this year's Jolrun
is won by . . .

WO



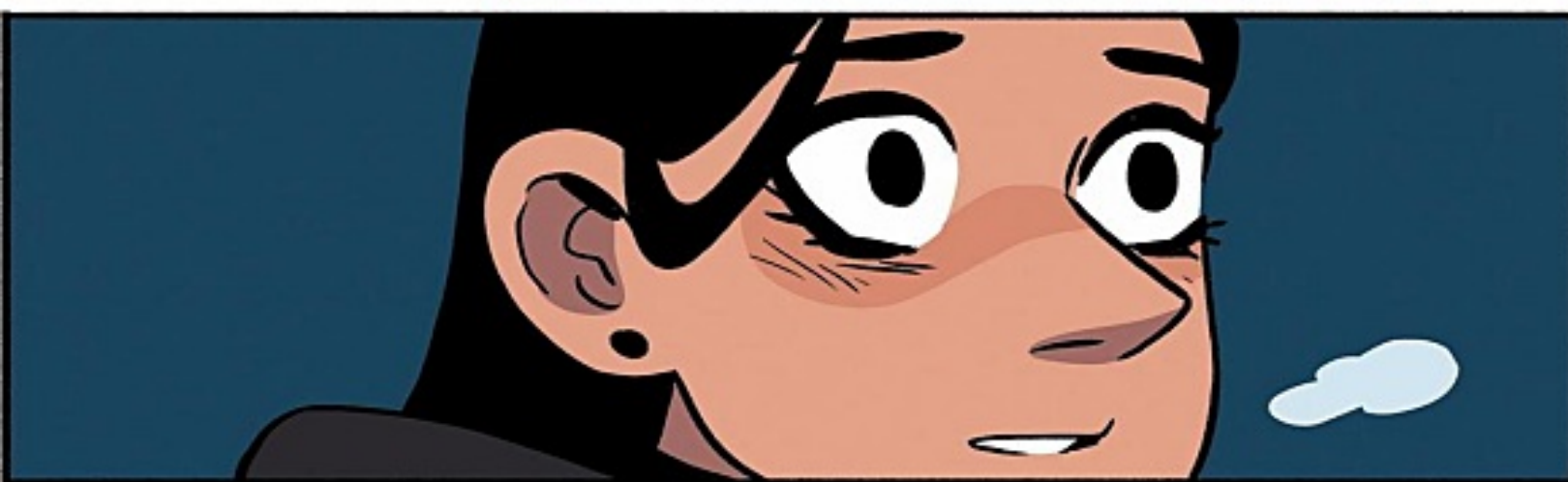




















First you
hurt Charlie.

And . . .
and Mikasi.

And then,
just when things were
getting better . . .



You hurt
Aster.







Ariel.

The
Leyline Crux.



Of course.





There
you are.

A boy and a girl are sitting on the ground in a forest. The boy is on the left, wearing a blue shirt and orange overalls, looking towards the girl. The girl is on the right, wearing a green jacket and brown boots, looking away with a sad expression. There are trees and bushes in the background.

What happened?

...

A close-up of the boy's face. He has a worried expression, with wide eyes and a slightly open mouth.

Aster will be okay, you know.

A close-up of the girl's face. She has a sad and determined expression, looking slightly to the side.

I don't want to get mad at you, Charlie, so can you please just leave?

The boy is kneeling and pulling the girl's hand. The girl is sitting on the ground, looking down. The background shows trees and bushes.

You know that's not how I do things.

You're coming to dinner with me, let's go.





The things she's told me . . .

I think maybe I don't have a choice, after all.

What? You have an aunt?

Ariel --

She's coming to get me.

So this is goodbye.





So you told
Ariel to do the
Jolrun, and told
me not to.



Aster, I can
explain --

No, I
get it!

You just want
witch daughters, you
don't want your son
to be a witch!





I am proud
of you, Aster.

You're growing up
to be an incredible
witch, and you're so
brave in ways that
I'm not.



I'm sorry
I told you not
to compete.

I wanted to
protect you from
what other people
might think,
but . . .

that's
not my choice
to make.



And I can explain
about Ariel, but I need
to tell you a secret.



I'm listening.



No --
but -- you
can't go!

We're -- we're
friends, you mean so
much to me, I said I'd
always look out for
you --



I can
look out for
myself.

I always
have.

If you
stick around,
you'll just get
hurt.



Well . . .

I won't let
you leave!

Don't try
it, Charlie.







They drain powers.

From witches and shifters, even from each other . . .



They are constantly feuding, constantly preying on those who are weaker.

They see magic as a tool, and they have used it to hurt and kill to get what they want.

They are dangerous.



But Ariel has a chance. She doesn't have to be like that.



She doesn't have to be used by them.



That is Ariel's family . . .

And that is what I wanted to protect her from at all costs.



And she doesn't know any of this.







I know I have to tell her. But I want her to feel safe here first.

And I want to protect her . . . but you know Ariel. She's stubborn.

She has to choose to be protected.



And you thought that if she won the Jolrun she'd feel safer with us.

Something like that.



I'm sorry, Aster. I messed this up.

It's okay.



I can always
do the Jolrun
next year.

I . . . I
should find Ariel
and apologize.

Me too.

And . . .
it's time I tell
her about her
family.



Charlie!

What's
wrong?



Ariel's
leaving and I
couldn't stop
her.



She says her
aunt is coming
to get her.











And this child belongs with her blood!



Ariel?

Kids, stay back.



Besides, from what I hear, she hurts people.

Summoning a Fetch? You know that's dark magic.



It's better I take her.

What do you do-gooders want with her?

Come on,
Ariel!

Don't
do this.

When are
you gonna figure
it out? I mess
everything up!

The last time
I did, someone
died!

I'm trying
to leave you all
in peace!

You don't need
to explain yourself
to them.





Ready
to get out
of here?



Ariel,
don't!



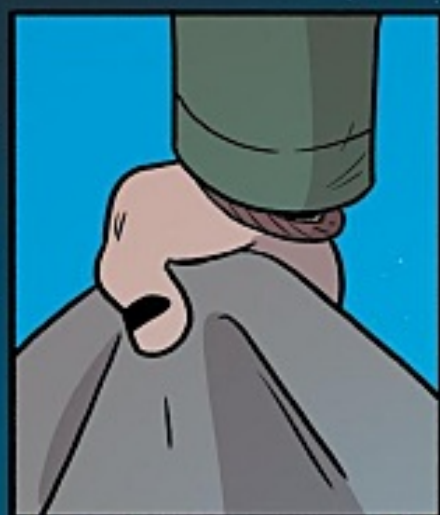












What are
you doing?

This isn't
people, this is
ASTER, he's my
FRIEND!



Let
him go.



Never.











You -- you idiot! Why did you grab on?!

You almost --



I'm so sorry, Aster.

You know . . . you could have just dropped me over the Jolrun and gone away with her.



But you let go, too.

She tried
to kill you!

I couldn't
have gone with
someone like
that!

... Even if
she was my only
family.

That was
the scariest thing
I've ever seen!

Is everyone
okay?

We're fine,
Mom!

F-fine!



You
know . . .



We could be
your family.













Also, I want to see the look on everyone's faces when you're crowned.

Especially Flint's.



I can try again next year.



She's stubborn, Aster.

I don't think you can talk your way out of this one.



I really don't want to be in the spotlight again.

I think I've made enough of an impression on . . .





Well, those of us
who were hoping for a nice
restful Midwinter Festival find
ourselves disappointed . . .



But we are honored
as well, to watch the youngest
members of our family show us
the meaning of magic.

And of
bravery.



Hey,
witch boy.







And
to crown Aster
Vanissen . . .













It's not
weakness.

It's a
good thing.



Do you
wanna go
dance?

Uh,
yeah!







Sorry I
zapped your
brother.

It was
funny.

Are you having
a fun Festival,
Mica?

Mm-
hmm.

THUMP



I think
you're cool and
I wanna be a
shifter when
I grow up!



Told you.



Good
luck!















MOLLY KNOX OSTERTAG

is the author and illustrator of the acclaimed graphic novels *The Witch Boy* and *The Hidden Witch*, as well as the illustrator of several projects for older readers, including the webcomic *Strong Female Protagonist* by Brennan Lee Mulligan and *Shattered Warrior* by Sharon Shinn. She grew up in the forests of upstate New York and graduated in 2014 from the School of Visual Arts, where she studied cartooning and illustration. She currently lives in Los Angeles with her wife and several pets. You can find her online at mollyostertag.com.

MAARTA LAIHO spends her days and nights as a comic and graphic novel colorist, where her work includes *Lumberjanes*, *Delver*, and the *Wings of Fire* series. When she's not doing that, she can be found hoarding houseplants and talking to her cat. She lives in the woods of Maine.